

# SJCV & Interfaith

## OUR BEGINNINGS

VOLUME 1  
ISSUE #1



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# Who Are We?

This interfaith magazine as well as other components of [awakeningproject.ca](http://awakeningproject.ca) are all created and moderated by students in an initiative called The 'Awakening Project', sponsored by St. Joseph's Ventures. The team consists of university students who are committed to helping other young people become more aware of various social justice issues throughout the world today.

Many young people today are "asleep" as they scroll through social media, consume biased news-sources, thus, an "awakening" is ever so needed. Throughout the project, we will take a look at prophetic voices, interfaith dialogue and social justice issues so as to promote critical dialogue and conversation about the injustices around us both locally and internationally. Through that, young people may gradually become exposed to the challenges of our times and become voices and advocates for the voiceless of society.

# OUR VISION

The 'Awakening Project' is a public education and citizen engagement initiative to awaken citizens to injustices in our communities, both local and international.

# OUR MISSION

To find ways for people of different faiths and backgrounds to 'pull together' for a more just society.

To learn more or partake in this  
*Mission and Vision*,  
of The 'Awakening Project' visit:  
[www.awakeningproject.ca](http://www.awakeningproject.ca)

# introduction to different faith traditions

*In the following pages you will be introduced to a few of the most common religions worldwide. This will give you a small idea of what these religions stand for and by no means encompasses all the teachings or philosophies of a certain faith - we just want you to first be familiar with some of their beautiful key concepts! All the information used is cited at the end of this issue and you can find the original sources in the 'References' section. Particularly, most of the sections are excerpts from Quinlan et al.'s (2001) textbook. Every faith has something unique, outstanding, and special about them and we hope you will be able to see that as you read through the different religious traditions. Happy reading!*

# ॐ HINDUISM ॐ

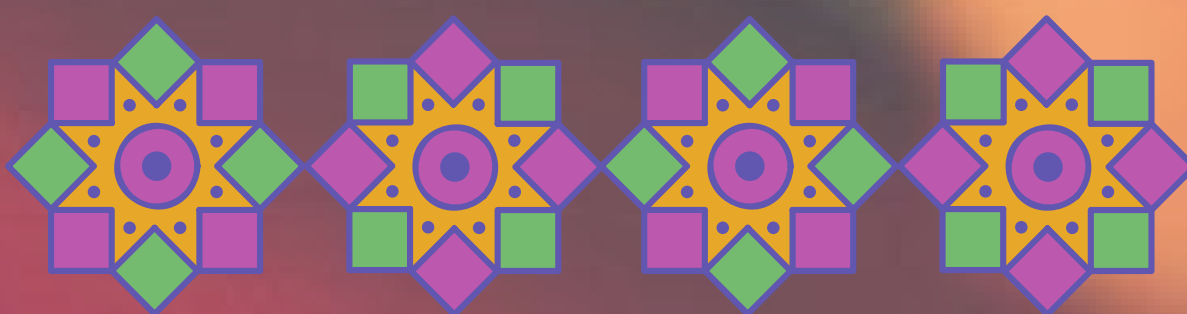
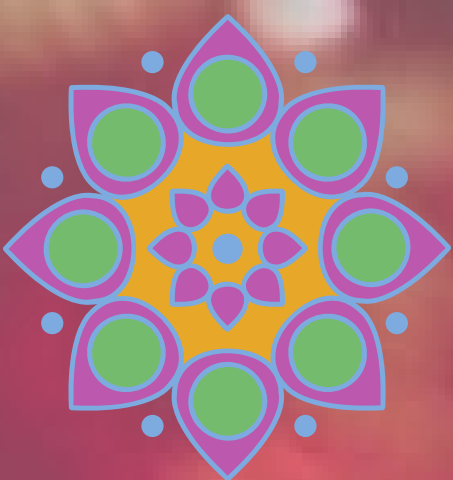
Unlike other religious traditions, for example, Christianity and Buddhism, Hinduism was not founded by a particular individual. Because it was not limited by the influence of any one person, Hinduism absorbed ideas and practices that suited its social and cultural framework as it evolved over thousands of years. This accommodation of new thoughts may account for the generally inclusive nature of this religion. Hinduism is the product of the various people that have occupied the region of India through time, which might explain its diverse and complex nature. However, the foundation of Hinduism was probably laid by two groups of people—the Indus Valley civilization and the Aryans. The earliest evidence of religious thought in India was uncovered during the archaeological excavations along the banks of the Indus river in 1926. This civilization, which extended over the area that is now Pakistan and northwestern India. Hinduism is often described as a non-dogmatic religion where one is free to worship any set of doctrines or rules as his or her conscience dictates.

It may not be easy for non-Hindus to understand the Hindu concept of God. Some describe Hinduism as polytheistic, meaning a religion of many Gods; others describe it as monotheistic, which means believing in only one God; it might also be described as monistic, where God is an impersonal and unknowable entity. The early hymns of the Rig-Veda praise the spirits of natural forces such as fire, thunder, dawn, water, earth, and the sun. The hymns praised individual deities, but the Vedic sages believed that they represented different manifestations or aspects of the same supreme being. The Upanishads refers to this supreme being as Brahman, an entity without form and quality. It is the soul of the universe.

**POLYTHEISTIC**  
many Gods

**MONOTHEISTIC**  
one God

**MONISTIC**  
unknowable God



Brahma has four faces and is seated on a lotus. Saraswati is the goddess of learning and arts. Her vehicle is a peacock or a swan. Vishnu is the preserver of the universe, he has four arms in which he holds a conch shell, a discus, a lotus, and a mace. Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth, happiness and good fortune. She blesses her worshippers with wealth and liberation. Shiva is the destroyer and restorer of the universe and is associated with creative energy. His wife is Parvati. Parvati is the mother goddess whom Hindus worship as shakti or female energy. Atman is the human soul or spirit. It is part of our innermost self that is identical to Brahman, the universal soul.



Vishnu, who preserves the universe



Brahma, who creates the universe



Shiva, who destroys the universe

A Hindu's goal in life is to reunite the Atman with the Brahman. In Hinduism, there are four paths to salvation. The path a Hindu follows generally depends on his or her nature and inclinations. Bhakti yoga, is the path of devotion. It is one of the simpler paths to salvation and involves devotion and love toward a personal deity. Karma yoga is the path of action, the key to this path is good deeds and thoughts, which will lead to the accumulation of good karma. Jnana yoga is the path of wisdom, this difficult path calls for the guidance of a guru, or teacher. Followers learn about the relationship between Brahman and Atman and about the nature of the universe. Raja yoga is the path of meditation, followers of this path achieve salvation through meditation, or deep contemplation, on Brahman.



# JUDAISM



Of the recognized major religions, Judaism is by far the smallest. Judaism is the first of the world's great monotheistic religions. The Bible is the instrument through which Jewish religious truth is recorded and communicated. While one might assume that this study should begin with Adam and Eve, it is more historically precise to begin with the patriarch of the Hebrew faith, Abraham. We start with Abraham because he represents the first steps taken in the formation of Hebrew religious practice that would eventually evolve into Judaism. According to Hebrew scriptures, around 2000 BCE, Abraham received a vision from God that instructed him to leave his home in the Mesopotamian city of Ur and move to Haran and later to Canaan. Abraham was instructed to move to a special land to raise a nation. He did what God commanded, eventually settling in Canaan. At this point in the history of the religion, two ideas emerged that would develop Judaism. First, the idea arose that the Jews represented God's chosen people. Second, the idea of a Promised Land was established. These two ideas are the foundation of the covenant that God made with Abraham. According to Jewish tradition, the covenant between God and the Hebrew people took on new significance during the time of Moses. When a severe drought struck Canaan, the descendants of Abraham were forced to move to Egypt. Eventually, the Egyptians turned on the Hebrews and enslaved them. Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt across the Red Sea into the region of the Sinai peninsula. This mass emigration is known historically as the Exodus.





Jewish beliefs centre on the idea of the oneness of God and the compassion God shared with creation in the form of the covenant. God governs the universe with justice and honour. Nothing happens without God, therefore humanity has an obligation to worship God. A Jew is a person who is either born Jewish or converts to Judaism. In the case of birthright, Jewish heritage generally follows the matrilineal descent of the child. In other words, if a child's mother is Jewish, then the child is Jewish. Judaism teaches that the covenant is a fact of life for all creation. It speaks to the reality that people are all connected and that, if they want fulfillment in life, they must treat life as an ongoing covenant. The Jewish tradition is one that is rich in its worship and prayer practices. Worship is certainly not confined to the Synagogue; the home is an important venue for worship as well. The Synagogue is the communal place of worship for Jews and is considered a place of gathering, of prayer, and of study or learning. The Sefer Torah, or Torah scroll, is the text of the five books of Moses written on parchment. It is the most sacred object of Jewish life and is essential for worship. The Torah reading is the central part of certain worship services during the week.



Inside Dohány Street Synagogue  
in Budapest, Hungary



# CHRISTIANITY

Christians refers to those who belong to Christianity and therefore, profess faith in Jesus Christ, believed to be the Son of God, the Messiah and Saviour of humankind. The figure of Jesus Christ is more than a prophet - Christians believe that Jesus was both true God and true man. He was sent by God over two-thousand years ago and born as a lowly baby, a son of humble Jewish parents, Mary and Joseph. Upon reaching the age of 30, he went out preaching the Good News and in this ministry, besides the famous miracles recorded in the Gospels, he taught people of the love of God, and the importance of loving God and loving neighbour. However, this message of love was not widely accepted by all, as the teachings and the way Jesus observed Jewish law seemed to go against the practices of the time. Jesus had a great number of followers but kept close to him a group of twelve men, often called the twelve-apostles. These men would later go on to be the first "bishops" and preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

At the age of 33, after three years of ministry, tensions grew among the religious leaders and even political leaders regarding this man named Jesus. Ultimately, one of the twelve-apostles, Judas Iscariot betrayed him. The Roman Governor at the time, upon being pressured by the people, had Jesus tortured and crucified on a cross. While the people and the religious and political leaders thought the execution of Jesus was the end of the story, Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to his followers forty-days before ascending back to heaven.

Fifty-days after Jesus' rising from the dead and just days after the Ascension of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was sent and descended upon the apostles. That day, known as Pentecost, began a 2000-year long mission of the Church as the apostles, once lowly and scared men, courageously went out to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ, proclaiming it to the point of martyrdom - death because of professing and believing in the name of Jesus. Today, there are over two-billion Christians . [1]

While there are over two-billion Christians around the world, the Church has faced much division throughout the ages. Christianity has been divided into many denominations – most notable are Catholics (according to the Anuario Pontificio 2018 of the Vatican, there are 1,329 billion Catholics worldwide), Protestants, Anglican, Baptists and Lutherans to name a few. Though divided in certain dogmas and doctrines, all of these Christian denominations are united in the fact that all profess their faith in the name of Jesus Christ, whom they believe to their Lord and Saviour.

[7]  
<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2010/number/all/>





# Islam

Islam is the second largest and currently the fastest growing religion in the world. Islam is an Arabic word that means “submitting to God”. A person who follows the teachings of Islam is called a Muslim, “one who submits to God and finds peace in Him”. Specifically, Muslims are adherents of Islam who submit to the will of God. Islamic belief is captured in their creed, called the Shahadah, which states: “There is no God but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God”. This creed is central to all of Islam. It is the organizing principal around which all other beliefs are formed. Muslims believe that, in the seventh century, God sent a series of revelations through the Archangel Gabriel to a man named Muhammad, who is seen as the last Prophet sent to humanity by God. Many ideals and customs of Arabian society at the time of Muhammad were transformed by the birth and development of Islam.

أَشْهَدُ أَنْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ

**I bear witness that there  
is no god besides Allah**

وَأَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّدًا عَبْدُهُ وَرَسُولُهُ

**and I bear witness that Muhammad  
is His servant and messenger.**

*The  
Shahadah*

The people of Arabia held a belief in a variety of different Gods in a form of religious expression known as polytheism. Polytheism was actively expressed in the practice of idolatry, the worship of different objects, usually in the form of a sculptures and pictures. By the time Muhammad was born, Muslims believed the Ka'bah, a cube shaped building that Abraham built to honour God, was filled with idols. For Muslims, beliefs are a purely personal affair. While it is regarded as a charitable act to guide others to the Truth and to dispel ignorance, Muslims are not called on to compel anyone to believe what they believe. From a Muslim's perspective, to align oneself with the will of God. Muslims owe their religious faith to Muhammad, the messenger of God. Muslims believe God's proper name is Allah.

The monotheistic belief in one God created a shift from the idolatry and polytheism that characterized the Arabian belief system prior to Muhammad. The belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God is central to the Muslim faith. God is one, but even though He is one, He is capable of doing all sorts of things. God is not only the Creator, but the master of all. Muslims believe that every person living on earth has a soul that lives on earth for one lifetime and, upon death of the body, moves on to an afterlife. The motto of Islam is summed up in the expression in the Qur'an that states: "Well-being in this world and well-being in the Hereafter." Muslims place a tremendous amount of emphasis on upholding the tenets of their faith. Specifically, this is demonstrated through the five Pillars of Islam. The five Pillars were established in the Qur'an. The first Pillar is Shahadah—Declaration of faith, second is Salat—Mandatory prayer five times a day, third is Zakat—Mandatory almsgiving, fourth is Sawm—Mandatory fasting, and the fifth Pillar is Hajj- Mandatory pilgrimage to Makkah. The holiest book in Islam is the Qur'an, which means "recitation". Muslims will chant the Qur'an aloud rather than read it silently. In the teachings of Islam, there are certain "external" duties such as prayer, fasting, charity, and abstaining from evil and wickedness.



# SIKHISM



Sikhism is one of the younger of the world's major religions. It was founded less than five centuries ago in northwestern India. The word Sikh means student or learner. Today, a Sikh is one who follows the teachings of the religions founder, Guru Nanak, and his successors. Sikhism traces its founding to Guru Nanak who was born a Hindu in 1469, in a small village near Lahore, located in present day Pakistan. Guru Nanak felt compelled to deliver his message to a wider audience. He set out on a journey to teach people about the One God of Sikhism. Sikhs believe in one God, who is the creator of the universe and the sovereign ruler. He is known as Waheguru, which means "Wonderful Lord". For Sikhs, equality for all is a fundamental belief. They believe all human beings are created equal and that anything that emphasizes inequality is a creation of human beings and not of God.

They believe, therefore that God made and loves all people. This belief was a clear reaction to the Hindu caste system, which categorized people into groups. Sikhs believe in the dignity of one's labour. This is called Kirat Karni. Sikhs also believe in charity and serving others, which is called Seva. Sikhs also believe that women and men are born equal. Women are encouraged to participate fully in religious services, even to the point of becoming Granthis, a reader of the Holy book and a teacher, or priest. A Sikh is any person who faithfully believes in one immortal being, the ten gurus, from Guru Nanak Dev to Guru Gobind Singh, the Guru Granth Sahib, who is the last Guru, Holy text of Sikhism, and the utterances and teachings of the ten Gurus.

The Gurdwara is a building where Sikhs gather to worship. Gurdwara means "the door of the Guru," or "Gods home". During services, people sit on a carpeted floor and may leave at any time. According to tradition, men and women sit separately. At the end of the service, special hymns are sung. Everyone joins in the singing, before standing to say a special prayer called the Ardas. In addition, there are certain religious customs and codes of behaviour that they honour in their daily lives. An important aspect of their day is reciting daily prayers, called Nit Nem. Sikhs also read the scriptures on a regular basis. The visible symbols of the Sikh community have proven to be controversial for many Canadians. This is largely based on the misunderstanding and confusion surrounding the five K's. The five K's include, Kesh, which means "uncut hair", Kangha, known as a comb, Kara, a plain steel bracelet worn on the right wrist, steel being a sign of strength, Kieran, a short sword that serves as a symbol of dignity, and Kaccha, short pants. The five K's are a fundamental part of Sikh belief.

## THE FIVE K'S

All Sikh men wear five signs of their faith. Each begins with the letter K in Punjabi. They are known as the Five K's.



Most Sikhs also wear a turban to keep the hair neat and tidy, and to resemble Guru Gobind Singh.



# Concluding Remarks

Dear Reader,

Thank you for reading the first issue of our first ever Interfaith magazine, written for youth by youth. We are extremely excited to continue this project and continue to champion interfaith dialogue, tolerance, and acceptance as it is a crucial part in promoting a harmonious society. Our goal is to inspire and educate youth on these interconnected planes of faith and encourage the next generation to see and act upon the importance of promoting interfaith causes. We humbly thank you again for your participation as a reader in this copy and look forward to preparing another issue in which we can delve into more specific interfaith initiatives.

Yours sincerely,

The Awakening Project Team



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<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2010/number/all/>

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